

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 10, 2021

Prepared on November 17, 2021

ITEM NUMBER: 10

SUBJECT: Executive Officer's Report to the Board

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ACTION: Information/Discussion

KEY INFORMATION: This item presents a brief discussion of issues that may interest the Board and the program performance measures. Upon request, staff can provide more detailed information about any item.

Agricultural Order 4.0 (R3-2021-0040) Updates

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On April 15, 2021, the Central Coast Water Board adopted General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands, [Order No. R3-2021-0040](#)¹ (Ag Order 4.0). The following includes recent updates regarding Irrigated Lands Program (ILP) staff's implementation actions. Staff will continue to provide periodic Ag Order 4.0 implementation updates in the Executive Officer's Report to supplement the more detailed and formal annual updates.

Irrigated Lands Program Website

In early 2021, ILP staff began coordinating with the State Water Board Division of Information Technology (DIT) to undertake a complete update of the [ILP website](#).² ILP staff envisioned a visually appealing and mobile friendly website that provided current information on Ag Order 4.0. As part of this effort, ILP staff also focused on creating Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessible website content. Currently, most documents on the updated ILP website are now accessible, and staff are working with DIT to make all remaining website documents accessible. A big thank you to DIT for their ideas and assistance to make these important website updates happen.

¹https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/regulatory_information.html

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/rwqcb3/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/index.html

Compliance Calendar

As ILP staff have done with previous versions of agricultural orders, staff prepared a Compliance Calendar to provide growers and other interested parties with a condensed overview of Ag Order 4.0 requirements, due dates for compliance, and references to the Order and associated Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment B to the Order) where the requirements can be found. The English version of the Compliance Calendar was uploaded to the ILP website on June 4, 2021. In late June 2021, ILP staff emailed all growers enrolled in Ag Order 4.0 to provide information such as each ranch's Groundwater Phase Area and Surface Water Protection Area and website links to the Compliance Calendar and other useful documents.

ILP staff updated the website with Spanish and Mandarin translations of the Compliance Calendar in July 2021 and referenced the [Compliance Calendar](#)³ throughout the July 2021 Ag Order 4.0 Introductory Workshops.

GeoTracker

ILP staff continue to coordinate with the State Water Board's GeoTracker team to update existing report forms to incorporate new requirements in Ag Order 4.0. The updated electronic notice of intent (eNOI) and Total Nitrogen Applied (TNA) report forms are now available on GeoTracker. Revisions to the Annual Compliance Form are in progress. ILP staff is working with Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc., the approved third-party program, to facilitate batch uploads of TNA reporting and groundwater sampling data for participating members. All third-party program batch uploaded data will be associated with an individual ranch's unique GeoTracker global identifier number.

Third-Party Program Coordination

Third-party program coordination is progressing in a timely and effective manner. ILP staff began holding bi-monthly coordination meetings with Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc. shortly after they were approved as a third-party program administrator in July of 2021. Coordination discussions to date include: roles and responsibilities, enrollment and permit fee collection, education and outreach efforts, TNA reporting and groundwater sampling data batch uploads to GeoTracker on behalf of their participating members, third-party program assistance with groundwater well monitoring (domestic and "pre-trend"), and prioritization of groundwater follow-up monitoring in disadvantaged community (DAC) areas.

Nitrogen Removal Conversion Coefficients

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Fertilizer Research and Education Program (FREP) released a Special Request for Proposals in January 2020 seeking research to determine nitrogen accumulation and removal coefficients for

³https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/compliance_calendar/index.html

specific crops grown in the central coast region (including Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties). Ag Order 4.0 includes nitrogen removal conversion coefficients for 93% of all crop acres on the central coast region. This special request focused on 21 priority crops identified by the Central Coast Water Board as requiring additional research to determine or improve nitrogen removal coefficients specific to cropping systems in the central coast region. This project was initiated in June 2020 and is being led by multiple University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) researchers in the central coast region. This project will be finalized in December 2023 and will increase the nitrogen removal conversion coefficient coverage to approximately 97% of all crop acres on the central coast region.

Currently the UCCE researchers are conducting assessments of nitrogen removal in harvested crops. The UCCE researchers will continue conducting these assessments over three growing seasons. Calculation of nitrogen removal conversion coefficients for the first season of sampling is currently underway. Once finalized these additional nitrogen removal conversion coefficients will be included in a revised version of the Ag Order 4.0, Monitoring and Reporting Program, for growers to use when calculating and reporting their nitrogen removal information.

Growers who grow specialty crops for which nitrogen removal coefficients are not available or choose not to use coefficients provided by the Central Coast Water Board have the option of developing their own conversion coefficient by following approved standard protocols to collect samples from their operation, or similar operation, and obtain a laboratory result for the samples. These standard protocols are currently in development by Central Coast Water Board staff in coordination with UCCE researchers and CDFA and are on track to be approved by the Executive Officer within 12 months of Ag Order 4.0 adoption.

Cover Crop Nitrogen Scavenging Credit

In addition to the standard maximum allowable cover crop nitrogen scavenging credit, Ag Order 4.0 allows for the use of a calculated cover crop nitrogen scavenging credit based on certain criteria and forthcoming standard protocols to determine the nitrogen concentration in cover crops. ILP staff are coordinating with UCCE and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) researchers to develop the standard protocols. UCCE and USDA researchers are in the process of collecting and analyzing crop samples to inform the development of the standard protocols and appear to be on track to submit them for Executive Officer approval within 18 months of Ag Order 4.0 adoption.

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Please see the following standard attachments.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Table 1 - 401 Water Quality Certification Applications Received
2. Table 2 - 401 Water Quality Certifications Issued
3. Table 3 - Groundwater Section, Case Closure Performance Scoreboard
4. Table 4 - Groundwater Case Closures
5. Table 5 - Enrollments in General Orders/Waivers

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